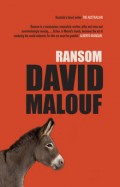
## [Ransom](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom" \o "Ransom) –Study Guide

[](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/0Ransom-David-Malouf2_Size4-e1303969293147.jpg)**Background**

Credited as the author of two of the greatest works of literature, the blind poet Homer is renowned for writing the legendary stories, [*The Iliad*](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/the-iliad) and its sequel, *Odyssey*. His poems are regarded as the oldest extant works of Western literature. *The Iliad* is a story about the Trojan War that took place during Ancient Greek times. It is only through this piece of literature combined with other authors’ works that we are aware of such an event. Whether or not it existed has been debated throughout the centuries, and thus, we regard Homer’s writing as a strong contribution to the beginnings of Greek mythology, a collection of myths concerning Greek religion and culture. The common theme of all Greek mythology concerns powerful gods, heroes, mythological creatures and humans. These myths have had major influences in art and culture, and even during modern society today with its teaching of our beginnings, history and, morals and lessons for our daily lives.

In Ancient Greece, it was believed that gods had a great authority over human existence. Since one’s destiny was thought to be pre-determined by gods, mortals lived in accordance with their rules. This was done in an effort to appease and avoid insulting them or one would risk a doomed fate. Thus, the line between human choices and god's puppetry was unclear as the events and incidences in the peoples’ lives unfold.

The Trojan War, as described in *The Iliad*, is known to be the greatest conflict of all Greek mythology. It is a mortal battle between the Greeks and Trojans that began due to a conflict between the gods. Drawn from a section of *The Iliad*, David Malouf’s poignant novel *Ransom* explores the themes of revenge, redemption and fate during the Trojan War. While *The Iliad* is heavily focused on the gods and the battles fought amongst the people, *Ransom* explores a new avenue of human relationships through two main characters: Achilles, the greatest warrior and hero of the Trojan War and Priam, the elderly king of Troy who has lost his son in battle.

**Setting / Time**

The city of Troy, a place that was initially believed to be factual until Archaeologists excavated sites in Turkey during the 19th century. The city is now widely accepted to have existed, with the Trojan War dated between 1194 – 1184 BC.

**Purpose**

Although war was the solution to major conflicts during the Ancient Greek period, David Malouf highlights the superior notion of mediation. The occurrence of war and its consequences leads to a multitude of deaths, and thus pain and suffering for all those involved. Ultimately, while one side may prevail, the residing feelings of hostility from one team towards another will inevitably continue. On the other hand, peace can achieve resolution, redemption and even new hope since both sides can cooperate in the future. Hence, it is shown that negotiation is a better pathway than surging into war.

In this time, royalty was viewed as always superior to the common populace. Nevertheless, through the relationship of the king Priam and commoner Somax, it is shown that our social status only provides us a position of power or authority, yet does little to teach us the simplest lessons in life. Somax is shown to be far more informed and knowledgeable man than even the king, highlighting that regardless of our name and position, anyone can teach another human new experiences and teachings.

*Ransom* also suggests that no matter our age, whether young or old, it is never too late to change our ways. Although we may have created a comfortable mould over the years with our behaviour, opinions and actions, we always have time to create a transformation.

Additionally, a more philosophical purpose of the novel is displayed through the message that life comes and goes. As humans, the people and events in our lives are of the utmost importance to us. We experience a spectrum of emotions from contentment and pleasure to sorrow and pain. In the end however, as our lives are destined for death, the lessons that we learn also disappear with us. Thus, in the scheme of things, our lives are insignificant. As time continues on, the effect of our place in the world gradually fades away as new life and forms emerge once again.

## [Characters](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/characters)

**Priam**

Priam is an elderly king of Troy. As a child, his sister Hesione saved him from slavery, and had his named changed from Podarces to Priam, the name meaning ‘the ransomed one’ or ‘the price paid.’ After the death of his son Hector, Priam envisions himself in plain clothing, riding a plain cart to Achilles who is effectively holding Hector ransom. His vision is the catalyst for the novel’s events, for his journey is one of learning and self-development. Though the royal family is doubtful of his plan to save Hector, Priam is resolute and insists that he needs to try his best to confront Achilles as a father, rather than as king. After many decades as king of Troy, Priam is determined to reinvent how he will be remembered; as a king who performed an extraordinary act of heroism in order to save his beloved son.

**Achilles**

Achilles is known as the greatest warrior of the Greeks. The death of Patroclus, his closest companion and hinted lover, drives Achilles to insanity. Hector murdered Patroclus, and as a result Achilles takes revenge by killing Hector. He then drags Hector’s dead body along the walls of Troy for the next 11 days. Achilles loses his sense of humanity, as he is possessed by his rage, hatred and grief.

**Somax**

Somax is representative of the ‘common man’ in *Ransom*. He is chosen to escort Priam to Achilles. His simple and plain presence is contrasted with Priam’s royal status. He often engages in useless chatter and performs daily activities in a way that is foreign to the king. Although Somax is far from royalty, his great deal of affection for his daughter-in-law and granddaughter teaches Priam about love, family and life.

**Beauty**

Beauty is Somax’s favourite mule. She accompanies Priam and Somax on their journey to the Greek camp where Achilles’ resides.

**Shock**

Somax’s other mule who carries the cart to Achilles’ camp.

**Hecuba**

Hecuba is Priam’s beloved wife and mother of Hector. She is initially uncertain of Priam’s vision to save Hector. However after hearing Priam’s sentimental reasons she shows support and urges him to first share his plan with their family and the kingdom’s council before he departs.

**Hector**

Hector is Priam’s son and also the leader of the Trojan army. He is kind, brave and noble without any cruel intentions, unlike his rival Achilles. During a battle between the Trojans and the Greeks, Hector kills Patroclus. This results in Achilles challenging Hector to a battle, learning to Hector’s death and Achilles’ triumph.

**Neoptolemus**

Neoptolemus is Achilles’ son. Although he is mentioned throughout *Ransom*, he makes his first appearance at the end of the novel where he savagely slaughters an old and defenseless Priam in an effort to avenge his father’s death.

## [Themes & Symbols](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/themes-symbols)

**Themes**

**Identity**

Ransom explores who we are and what it means to have an identity. As the leader of Troy for many decades, Priam has always viewed himself as a king. It appears as though Priam has been unhappy with his identity for quite some time, since he continues to age, is physically weak and feels as though he cannot protect his kingdom as efficiently as he used to. However, the death of Hector is a catalyst for Priam for he realises that he needs to become a ‘father’ rather than the ‘king’ he had become so accustomed to. His search for Hector is also a search for himself, to reinvent who he is and how he wishes others to remember him.

Meanwhile, Somax is designated as the king’s herald, with the name Idaeus. He secretly notes his unhappiness with this appointment, since he is ‘Somax, not Idaeus.’ The name ‘Somax’ is associated with many significant events in his life including his marriage and family, yet the new unfamiliar name strips him of this identity. Somax’s confidence and pride in his identity is starkly contrasted with Priam’s pursuit for an identity transformation.

**Change**

Malouf demonstrates that it is never too late to change one’s ways. Priam’s determination to change how he is remembered – from just another king leading a regal life to a hero who went to extraordinary lengths to regain his child – demonstrates that change is at our grasp. Even though his beautiful wife Hecuba and the rest of his family have reservations about his desire to confront Achilles, Priam is resolved in taking a ‘chance,’ rather than achieving nothing by remaining within the walls of his home. Unexpectedly, this one idea propels Priam into a multitude of other changes. His journey with Somax teaches Priam a far greater deal than he had anticipated for he learns to appreciate the value of love and other simplicities in life.

Although Achilles is driven by hatred and anger after Patroclus’ death, likewise with Priam he manages to change his ways. He is touched by Priam’s pleads and consequently accepts the ransom and returns Hector’s body. He is able to reach this state of peace by releasing his immoral intentions and even offers to hold a ritual Hector’s body in the Greek walls that very night. This transformation from a human who faced grief with revenge to acceptance and forgiveness demonstrates the benefits we can gain from amending our ways.

**Revenge, Guilt and Peace**

Revenge is a vicious cycle that is never-ending until both parties reach a negotiation or peace. After Patroclus’ death, Achilles hunts down Hector in order to avenge his best friend’s early death. Although he is successful in murdering Hector, Achilles does not follow the custom of leaving the body for the grieving family to bury. Instead, Achilles feels the need to mutilate the body day after day without any sense of remorse or regret. His additional need to inflict harm on Hector’s body indicates that revenge will not bring closure. His sense of loss is shown as he reflects feeling empty inside, to the point where he no longer feels like himself, but someone else altogether.

Although the Achilles and Priam ultimately find peace in themselves, many years later Achilles’ son Neoptolemus murders Priam bound with the same hatred and pain depicted by Achilles. Neoptolemus’ subsequent guilt and regret is carried with him throughout the rest of his life, demonstrating that again revenge is not the answer to any problem.

**Chance and fate**

The role of the gods is heavily weaved into the events that unfold in *Ransom.* Priam only begins his transition and journey after envisioning the goddess Iris, who suggests that he take a ‘chance’ and try to save Hector from Achilles’ camp. During his journey, a jovial young man who joins the travellers is revealed as Hermes, a god who has come to safely guide the elderly men to Achilles. The power of the gods in controlling human fate is illustrated during the scene where Hermes saves the travellers from being swept away by a stream.

Nevertheless, it can also be argued that it is the characters’ decisions that lead them to their fate. Although the Gods may have instilled the idea in Priam that he should rescue Hector, it is the king’s determination which is a main driving force for the journey. Even when confronted with doubt and hesitance from his family, it is Priam who pushes onwards to fulfil his vision.

**Nature versus man**

Man’s presence on earth is shown to have little significance in comparison to the power of nature. While the events in *Ransom* teach the characters many valuable lessons, ultimately these meaningful moments in the humans’ lives disappear as one reaches their fate – death. Time moves on beyond our lives as we are forgotten over decades and centuries while nature prevails. Priam’s desire to be remembered by others highlights how little significance a life possesses unless one behaves extraordinarily. Malouf demonstrates that in the end, life just is – we are granted by nature to have a brief existence yet in the end, nature and time will moves forward without us.

**Commoners versus royalty**

Although royalty is portrayed to be blessed with power and authority, ironically it is the commoners in Ransom who appear to be most ‘privileged.’ For the first time, Priam is exposed to the different interests and values of the common man and is intrigued by the simplicities of life. It is Somax, a mere old man from the marketplace who teaches Priam more about life than he had imagined possible.

**Symbols**

**Jove’s eagle**

Jove’s eagle is a representation of the eagle, a bird renowned for its keen sight. The presence of Jove’s eagle during Priam and Somax’s departure hints that the gods will safely guide their journey as the bird behaves as a lookout. Furthermore, the symbol of the eagle’s powerful vision is contrasted with Priam’s ‘blindness’ at the beginning of the journey since he is yet to experience the outside world. It is during the journey that he learns about himself and others, and thus improving his ‘sight.’ Coincidently, Jove’s eagle is no longer mentioned when Priam is endowed with his new insight.

**Cart**

The royal cart is ‘a fine new one, the marks of the adze still visible on its timbers. The twelve-spoked wheels are elaborately carved and painted, a wickerwork canopy covers the tray.’ On all occasions, the king had used this elegant cart to alert others that royalty was present. The use of this cart demonstrates how Priam has been encapsulated in his own royal sphere since everything is meticulously chosen and designed specifically for the king. Nevertheless, his demand for a ‘common work cart’ depicts his determination for a simple approach to Achilles. This simplicity highlights Priam’s desire to become just another man and father, anonymous in the plain cart with the hopes of retrieving Hector.

**Priam as a child**

At the beginning of the journey, Priam is characterised with childish traits. When Somax urges Priam to dabble his feet in the stream, words such as ‘obedient toddler,’ ‘three uncertain steps’ and ‘happy smile’ reflects the actions of a young child trying new experiences. This childish nature is contrasted with Priam’s old and frail age, which demonstrates that although he has lived a life in royalty, his lack of exposure to real life has left him crippled of the simplest experiences such as the cooling effect of feet in water and eating delicious homemade cookies.

**Cakes**

The cakes Somax brings along during the journey highlight Priam’s lack of knowledge of even the simplest things. For Somax, the little griddlecakes are a regular and delectable snack, yet Priam ‘ha[s] never seen them before.’ Priam’s unfamiliarity with the cakes represents his isolation from the ‘real world’ since he has been deprived from things that even commoners view as ordinary.

Futhermore, Somax’s lengthy chatter about his daughter-in-law cooking the cakes with the ‘batter bubbling and setting and turning a golden brown’ prompts Priam to think about the activities in his kingdom behind closed doors. He had previously never noticed that there was much preparation and work that went into the food that appeared at his table, let alone the ingredients and thickness of a batter. These matters had been of little concern for Priam yet he realises that even the ‘common and low…activities and facts of life, had an appeal.’

**Hector’s body**

Although Achilles drags Hector’s body across the walls of Troy for eleven days, each morning he would return to find Hector’s body healed of any wounds, and absent of any physical damage to his body. His body symbolises how revenge is not the answer to any battle, since dealing with a tragic loss through revenge does not gain anything, but only more pain and suffering.

**Sniffing**

Although Priam initially believes he understands the distress of losing a son, Somax’s experience with losing his son is driven with emotions that Priam had never previously experienced. When sharing the story of his son’s death, Somax sniffles, an ‘odd habit’ according to Priam. The use of ‘odd habit’ to describe Somax’s sadness demonstrates how Priam has never truly felt the loss of his sons, but only the loss of a royal relationship between king and prince.

Later on, Somax once again ‘snuffles’ and ‘rubs his nose’ at the thought of the ending to their journey. Similarly, Priam makes ‘small sounds’, presumably crying as well. The transformation of Priam from someone who failed to empathise with Somax’s tears at the beginning of the journey to a man filled with emotions demonstrates that Priam undergoes both a physical and metaphysical journey where he undergoes self-development and appreciation of the world around him.

## [The Iliad](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/the-iliad)

**Background to *The Iliad***

Zeus, the father of all gods and his brother Poseidon desired the goddess of water, Thetis. However, they were warned by Prometheus, an intelligent mortal who is better known for being chained to a rock as a result of stealing Zeus’ fire, that Thetis would give birth to a son who would be mightier than his father. Alarmed at this possibility, the two gods arranged for Thetis to marry Peleus, a mortal. Since humans were believed to be inferior to gods, this ensured that Thetis’ child would be a mere mortal and would cause the prophecy to be redundant.

All issues had appeared to be solved until the gods omitted Eris, the goddess of discord from Thetis and Peleus’ wedding invitation list. Furious at this insult, Eris arrived at the wedding with her own plans. She inscribed a golden apple with the words, ‘To The Fairest’ and threw it amongst the guests. Naturally, all goddesses desired to claim the prize. Eventually, the choice was narrowed down to three of the most beautiful goddesses: Aphrodite, Athena and Hera. Unable to reach a decision, they turned to Zeus to judge who should win the title. However, Zeus refused to do so and instead, elected a mortal who had good judgment of beauty to make the choice. This mortal was Paris, prince of Troy and whose birth produced a prophecy that he would one day bring misfortune to his people and town.

The three goddesses approached Paris with not only their beauty, but also bribes. Hera offered him power and control over Europe and Asia, Athena promised that she will make him a great warrior while Aphrodite would present him the most beautiful of woman on earth. Since Paris was more interested in women than power and war, he awarded Aphrodite with the golden apple.

Thus the beginning of Troy’s troubles began, since the most beautiful woman on earth, Helen, was already married to the Menelaus, king of Sparta. After a diplomatic mission to Sparta, Paris eloped with Helen, who had fallen in love with Paris upon their first encounter\*. Upon discovering Paris’ betrayal, Menelaus called on Helen’s many suitors to invade Troy and retrieve his wife. His brother, Agamemnon recruited and lead the Greek army into battle against the city of Troy, and thus began the Trojan War.

**The Iliad**

The story begins ten years into the Trojan War. Thetis, the goddess who had married Peleus gave birth to their mortal son Achilles, who was the mightiest of all Greeks, as predicted by the prophecy. Although he was a fighter for Agamemnon, their relationship was strained after Agamemnon demanded that Achilles give up his beloved war prize, Briseis. Since Agamemnon desired Briseis for himself, this enraged Achilles who consequently refused to fight in the Trojan War. This lead to dire consequences for the Greeks as they lost many men in battle and were forced to retreat to their ships after the Trojans successfully turned the tide of battle.

Concerned for his Myrmidons\*\* yet too proud to budge from his position, Achilles was persuaded to allow his close friend and comrade Patroclus, to wear Achilles’ renowned armour and lead his Myrmidons into battle. Seeing Achilles back in battle would rouse fear in the Trojans and cause them to temporarily retreat, allowing the Greeks to recover and rest. However, Achilles insisted that Patroclus only fight until the Greeks could successfully fend off the Trojans away from their ships.

Patroclus was skilled in battle and killed many Trojans. However, Patroclus disobeyed Achilles’ orders and continued to pursue the Trojans back to their gates. During this time he fought Hector, the prince of Troy and leader of the Trojan army, and was killed.

Fuelled with rage and grief over Patroclus’ death, Achilles agreed to fight once again for the Greek army, much to Agamemnon’s pleasure. In their next battle, Achilles killed many warriors and the Trojans were forced to retreat back to the safety of their walls. Hector, against the will of his family, faced Achilles alone outside the walls of his home, knowing that Achilles was on a path to avenge Patroclus’s death. In a fierce battle between the two great warriors, Hector was killed. Achilles took Hector’s body with him and dishonoured it day after day by chaining it to a chariot and dragging it along the walls of Troy. The gods agreed that this horrendous behaviour could not continue and sent the god Hermes to guide king Priam, father of Hector to the Greek camp. Once in their camp, Priam falls to his knees and pleads Achilles for the body of his son. Touched by the king’s words, Achilles relented, allowing Priam to finally hold a proper burial for Hector.

## [Chapter I](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/chapter-i)

**Plot**

Achilles, the greatest warrior of the Greeks stands next to the sea while reminiscing of the past. After his mother’s death he had ‘entered the rough world of men’ [pg 6] where wars and battles prevail. Every morning, he feels the need to ‘tramp to shore’ [pg 10] since he is haunted by the death of his ‘soulmate and companion’ Patroclus, and his raging hatred towards Hector, killer of Patroclus and thus, the ‘implacable enemy.’

When Achilles was a child, his cousin Patroclus, came to live with the young Achilles since the former had killed the son of a high official of the royal court due to a ‘quarrel over a game of knucklebones’ [pg 11]. In need of an asylum, Patroclus came to live with Achilles’ family. As the years passed, the pair grew closer to the extent where Achilles believes that ‘he had mated with Patroclus’ [pg 15].

When the tide of the battle was against the Greeks, Patroclus disguises himself in Achilles’ armour in order to instill fear in the Trojans and cause them to return to the safety of their walls, thus providing temporary relief for the Greeks. In his last act for his closest friend, Patroclus is killed in battle\*. The death of Patroclus left Achilles with an overwhelming sense of loss and also burning animosity. Achilles whispers that he will join Patroclus soon, but firstly, he has to avenge Patroclus’ killer, Hector.

Hector, the son of Trojan king Priam and leader of the Trojan army, wore Achilles armour as a sign of triumph and disrespect for the Greeks. In a dramatic battle between Hector and himself, Achilles was successful in killing his enemy. Achilles’ Myrmidons then stripped Hector of his armour and ‘without pity…plunged their swords into Hector’s unprotected flesh’ [pg 24]. For Achilles however, this was not enough. Still fuelled by his pain, Achilles ties Hector’s body to a chariot and drags it ‘up and down under the walls of Troy’ [pg 26] as the dead warrior’s royal family devastatingly watches on. Achilles feels like ‘dead man…feeling nothing’ [pg 26], unable to seal the void left by his beloved friend.

The next day, Achilles is furious to find Hector’s body ‘smoothly sealed and the torn flesh made whole again.’ His men cannot bear to look at him as he drives the chariot with Hector’s body along the walls of the Trojans once again. Afterwards he quickly falls asleep, into ‘oblivion’ [pg 35] as he struggles with his shame and guilt of his actions. He is ‘waiting for a break…something new and unimaginable’ in his life.

Notes:

\*Read more about the background to this incident [here](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/the-iliad).

**Analysis**

**The human side**

Along with the conflict between Greece and Troy, *Ransom* also delves into the consequences of those affected by the war. As the greatest warrior of all Greeks, Achilles has lived his life as a fighter. Nevertheless, his pathway in life has led him to believe that ‘such a life is death to the warrior spirit’ [pg 7]. While warriors are known for sacrificing their lives in the battlefield, Achilles does not literally refer to warriors confronting death each time they fight for their team. In fact, ‘death to the warrior spirit’ means to metaphorically lose what it means to 'live' when one experiences bloodshed in each war. Growing up surrounded in ‘the rough world of men’ [pg 6], Achilles develops traits of aggression, cruelty and vengefulness in order to become an implacable man of war. As a consequence, Achilles only knows how to deal with Patroclus’ death with a fighter’s mindset. Instead of grieving openly, ‘he never permit[s] himself to betray to others what he [feels]’ [pg 5] thus detaching himself from the natural human process of grieving. In order to deal with his friend’s tragic ending, Achilles ‘soul chang[es] colour’ as drags Hector's body for eleven days without any sense of regret or remorse and thus, is ‘death to his human spirit’ since he had no longer ‘a living man’ [pg 27]. He faces Patroclus’ death with the same warrior traits of aggression, cruelty and vengefulness, depriving himself of any ability to humanely mourn his close friend’s death.

Furthermore, Achilles grieves for his mother in the opening passages of *Ransom*. During this time of loss, his mother symbolises Achilles’ need to be nurtured. The imagery of the sea surface as a ‘belly’ and ‘a membrane stretched to a fine transparency’ [pg 3] represents his mother’s pregnancy where he ‘had hung curled in a dream of pre-existance’ for ‘nine changes of the moon’ – or in other words, nine months of pregnancy. Achilles is characterised as a feutus, for his position is ‘chin down, shoulders hunched’ as though he is inside a womb. Although Achilles is a fighter, he hides the fact that he wishes to be ‘rocked and comforted’ by his mother, thus demonstrating that even beneath the surface of a cold-hearted warrior, the current of human emotions can cripple a man’s confident veneer.

**Life and death**

Ransom explores life as a continuum, where life and death meet day after day as time ticks on. It is shown that life is transitional, since ‘the reflection of a face, a tree in a leaf…holds nothing, and itself cannot be held’ [pg 4]. This illustrates that although someone or something may exist during a certain amount of time, as time continues, these existences eventually fade away. The symbol of waves shown to be an ‘endless’ life cycle where new life ‘kick up, [and] gather[s]’ [pg 6] then reaches death as the waves ‘collapse.’ Although we may experience some time on earth, this cycle of life and death will continue, whether or not anyone is ‘here…to observe it.’

**Important Passages**

‘The sea has many voices…a hero’s death out there in full sunlight under the gaze of gods and men, for which the hardened self, the hardened body, had daily to be exercised and prepared.’ [pg 3 – 6]

‘From this moment on he could conceive of nothing in life he must live that Patroclus would not share in and approve…As in a different way, but through the same agency and in the same moment, he had been mated with Patroclus.’ [pg 14 – 15]

‘Of course he knew only too well what Patroclus intended by his brooding presence…But first he had Patroclus’ killer to deal with, in a last encounter out there under the walls of Troy.’ [pg 17- 21]

‘Achilles too staggered a moment…That would assuage his grief, and be so convincing to the witnesses of this barbaric spectacle that he too might believe there was a living man at the centre of it, and that man himself.’ [pg 24 – 27]

‘He will sleep now…Meanwhile, day after day, he rages, shames himself, calls silently on a spirit that does not answer, and sleeps.’ [pg 35 – 36]

**Important Quotes**

‘The gulf can be wild at times, its voices so loud in a man’s head that it is like standing stilled in the midst of battle.’ [pg 3]

‘The man is a fighter, but when he is not fighting he is a farmer, earth is his element.’ [pg 4]

‘One day, he knows, he will go back to it.’

‘But for the whole of his life he has been drawn, in his other nature, to his mother’s element.’

‘To what accepts, in a moment of stillness, the reflection of a face, a tree in leaf, but holds nothing, and itself cannot be held.’

‘He had grieved. But silently, never permitting himself to betray to others what he felt.’ [pg 5]

‘Days, weeks, season after season.’ [pg 8]

‘…the young man he is resists, and it is the buried rage of that resistance that drives him out each morning to tramp the shore. Not quite alone. With his ghosts.’ [pg 10]

‘From this moment on he could conceive of nothing in the life he must live that Patroclus would not share in and approve.’ [pg 14]

‘As in a different way, but through the same agency and in the same moment, he had been mated with Patroclus.’ [pg 15]

‘There were tears in his eyes.’ [pg 18]

‘He fet his soul change colour.’ [pg 24]

‘Still he felt nothing.’ [pg 27]

‘…a kind of envy for how free the creature is of a self-consciousness that at times makes us strange to ourselves and darkly divided.’ [pg 31]

‘But it is never enough. That is what he feels. That is what torments him.’ [pg 33]

‘He is waiting for the break.’ [pg 35]

‘Meanwhile, day after day, he rages, shames himself, calls silently on a spirit that does not answer, and sleeps.’ [pg 36]

## [Chapter II](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/chapter-ii)

**Plot**

Eleven days after Hector’s death, king Priam grieves in his city of Troy. The city is at the breach of ruins since he can only provide ‘weak protection’ [pg 40] due to his old age. He believes that he is the target of the gods’ mockery since he has lost the heir to his throne. Priam then envisions the goddess Iris, who informs Priam that it is not mockery, but chance since the events are ‘not the way they must be, but the way they have turned out’ [pg 46]. Amazed by the fact that chance is a factor in the events that have occurred in his life, he then sees himself dressed as plain man in a plain cart, with an unfamiliar man who draws two coal-black mules. Inside the cart is an abundance of gold. He realises that the gods have provided him the vision to create a plan to save Hector’s body from Achilles’ hostile forces. Resolute, he heads to his wife, Hecuba to share the plan.

Inside her sitting room, Hecuba suffers from a cold and is deprived of sleep. His wife is distraught that she cannot properly grieve because of Achilles’ disrespect for Hector’s body. Taking this queue to introduce his plan, Priam expresses that all his life he has never been a warrior, and always had Idaeus, a herald who speaks on behalf of the king. Priam wishes to change his ways, to do something extraordinary that will be remembered by others. He shares his vision about dressing plainly, sitting in a cart full of treasure while guided by a man and two mules. He reveals that he plans to present Achilles with this gold, in exchange for Hector – effectively a ransom. The reason why he wishes to be dressed plainly is because he doesn’t want to be a ‘king, but as an ordinary man, a father…[to] beg [to Achilles] humbly, on my knees if that is what it comes to, to give me back the body of my son’ [pg 56]. However, Hecuba is angered by Priam’s epiphany and is not persuaded by ‘this touching pantomime’ [pg 57]. She hisses that Achilles had broken his vow to Hector prior to their deathly match – that neither one would insult the loser’s body after the battle. Though he respects Hecuba words, Priam insists that he has at least attempt to save Hector’s body.

The king then reveals a past Hecuba was never privy to. When he was a child, his original name was Podarces. His father had promised his sister, Hesione to the great hero Heracles. After breaking his promise, Priam’s father and brothers were killed by Heracles. Only Priam was kept alive, and was sold to slavery. However, it was his sister Hesione who saved him from this awful situation. Heracles, took Hesione as a ‘prize of war’ [pg 73], and in return would grant anything Hesione wanted. She chose to save her brother from slavery. His name was changed to Priam, meaning ‘the price paid’ [pg 74] as a reminder of his sister’s sacrifice.

Heracles placed Priam on the throne of Troy, in place of a young dead prince of similar age. Priam continues to explain to Hecuba that his going to Achilles and offering treasure in return for Hector’s body will not only be a ransom for Hector but also himself. He will be ransomed a second time since the king will be exposed to Achilles and all his men, unprotected and ‘stripped of all glittering distractions and disguises’ [pg 79]. Although Hecuba relents, she suggests that they first call their family and councilors to hear of Priam’s plan.

An hour later, everyone is gathered inside the palace. Upon hearing Priam’s plan, the crowd stirs in protest, with many arguing that Priam is a king, and not merely any ordinary human as he wishes to portray himself in front of Achilles. Appreciative of their opinions, Priam remains affirmative and unwavering, and thus renders the party ‘reconil[ing] themselves and let[ting] him have his way’ [pg 90].

In the open courtyard that very afternoon, Priam is dressed in a ‘plain white robe of his vision’ awaiting the plain cart. A buzz of excitement arises from the crowd when an embellished cart detailed with designs and workmanship is rolled in. However, Priam is furious, deploring that no one listened to him, since he wishes to dismantle himself from the pride and distinction as king to simply a plain man in a plain cart.

Soon after, Beauty and Shock, two black mules from the marketplace are presented to the king, along with their elderly owner, Somax. The commoner is ‘dazzled by the cleanness, the whiteness of everything’ since he ‘has had no experience till now of princes’ [pg 93]. Somax is surprised at how old Priam appears; unlike the ‘imposing figure’ [pg 94] he had always seen from afar. Priam declares that Somax will be named Idaeus, since his regular herald will not accompany them. Somax is secretly unhappy with this new designation since he is proud of his original name. As the two old men draw away from the palace for the Greek’s camp, Jove’s emblem and messenger hovers above the crowd’s ‘celestial attention and concern’ [pg 102] below.

**Analysis**

**Priam**

The switch from Achilles’ to Priam’s perspective juxtaposes how the two men deal with grief and suffering. In contrast with Achilles, who is young and strong, Priam is characterised as old and weak. Now that the prince to the throne has passed away, the king worries over his kingdom that is ‘ravaged and threatened with extinction’ [pg 40] since he cannot sufficiently protect his family and their town, Troy. His name ‘Priam’ meaning ‘the price paid’ or ‘the ransomed one’ refers to the settlement between his sister Hesione and Heracles as he was ‘ransomed.’ It also represents a second meaning. As he entered the world of royalty, he was appointed a new identity and a new life. In this sense, his ‘ransom’ was also sacrificing his old identity in order to survive. After ‘a good sixty years now to consider the splendour and limitations of what it is to be a king’ [pg 85], Hector’s death is a catalyst for Priam, since he wishes to do something extraordinary in order to save his son and to reinvent his identity.

Priam’s discussion with Hecuba is filled with regret and hope. He reveals that he was not legitimately born as the prince of Troy when he was younger, but was destined for slavery when his fortress was besieged. At the age of six, he had ‘no more weight in the world than the droppings of the lowest beggar or street-sweeper’ [pg 70]. He realises that he has become so immersed in life as royalty that he has lost his connection to the real world, and wishes to do something for his son since he can longer stand by idly and watch Hector’s body subjected to painful disrespect day after day.

**Women**

Priam’s careful approach with Hecuba emphasises his utmost love and respect for his wife. Although women are believed to be inferior to men as they are often objects and slaves, the women of the Trojan War are illustrated to be confident, loyal, devoted and courageous. Only after Hecuba’s approval does Priam feel assured of his plans. Even during his speech to his family and council, his sons ‘turn to [Cassandra] now in the hope that their father…will listen to her’ [pg 85], demonstrating that although often uncredited, women have great influence over their counterparts. Furthermore, Hesione’s demand for her brother to be saved from an ill-fated life rather than something frivolous such as jewelry or clothes demonstrates that women are intelligent and strong-willed.

**Chance**

During Ancient Greek times, humans believed in the higher spirits of gods and goddesses who possessed the divine power to interfere with human life. The characterisation of humans as “toys” of the gods is noted throughout *Ransom*. Suffering from his greatest loss, Priam is convinced that the gods are ‘mock[ing him] as they had intended all along’ [pg 45]. However, through the goddess’ appearance in his vision, Priam is revealed a new outlook on life; that the events that unfold is not all fated by the gods, but by chance. This is idea of ‘chance’ suggests to Priam that *he* has the ability to control the outcomes of his situation. Thus, instead of another day ‘watching and silent[ly] pray[ing]’ [pg 44] for Hector’s descreated body, Priam steps out of his comfort of the court and relies on chance to permit his new venture.

Nevertheless, it can be argued that the gods planned Priam’s journey. It is only after Iris’ suggestion that there is a factor of ‘chance’ in human activities that essentially stimulates Priam’s desire to do something more than just allowing his life to pass by before him. Thus, the power of the gods and the influence of chance remains an obscure line in their influences over human forms.

**Christianity**

In conjunction with Greek mythology, *Ransom* also incorporates hints of Western religion through Christianity. Three main characters: Priam, Achilles and Hector are characterised as God, Satan and Jesus Christ respectively. Achilles immoral actions of desecrating Hector’s body depict him as Satan. His horrific evil actions appear to be beyond those possible of human malice as he is plagued with violence, hatred and war. Contrastingly, Priam is like a God as his new insight provides him with a sense of ‘supreme power’ and new-found wisdom. Meanwhile, Hector represents Jesus Christ on the cross, whose sacrifice will ultimately teach Priam and Achilles, and also all those in Troy and Greece, the power of salvation and forgiveness.

**Important Passages**

‘Here for eleven nights another man has been wrestling with dark thoughts as he lies sleepless on his couch…and the weightless medium in which his consciousness is adrift, where the gods, in their bodily presence, have the same consistency as his thoughts.’ [pg 40 – 42]

‘Not a mockery, my friend, but the way things are…If he is to face Hecuba and prevail, he has to be.’ [pg 46 – 49]

‘I am too old, I know, to put on armour and go to the field…Not quite a dream.’ [pg 53 – 54]

‘To go today, immediately, to Achilles, just as I saw myself in my dream… To try something that might force events into a different course.’ [pg 56 – 61]

‘There are things…along with the rest, to be dragged out of the crowd and claimed and heard no more of.’ [pg 69 – 71]

‘Priam lowers his head…they can only reconcile themselves and let him have his way.’ [pg 84 – 90]

‘Are you deaf?…and deeply set in their sockets and milky pale the eyes under their straggle of white brows.’ [pg 91 – 94]

**Important Quotes**

‘…weak protection.’ [pg 40]

‘It is nothing. There’s nothing I need.’ [pg 41]

‘He himself is dressed in a plain white robe without ornament. No jeweled amulet at his breats. No golden armbands or any other form of royal insignia.’ [pg 47]

‘He feels bold now, defiant. Sure of his decision. If he is to face Hecuba and prevail he has to be.’ [pg 49]

‘He feels the hard purpose he has come with flutter in him and fail.’ [pg 51]

‘It is not in his sphere.’ [pg 52]

‘Hector, all his limbs newly restored and shining, restored and *ransomed*.’ [pg 56]

‘And you expect this wolf, this violator of every law of gods and men, to take the gift you hold out to him and act like a *man*?’ [pg 58]

‘What I do is what any man might do.’ [pg 59]

‘But you are not *any* man.’

‘I have no more weight in the world than the droppings of the lowest beggar or street-sweeper.’ [pg 70]

‘Priam, the price paid. The substitute and pretender. A great one of the earth. But only by default.’ [pg 74]

‘I have had a good sixty years now to consider the splendour and limitations of what it is to be a king.’ [pg 85]

‘It is true that the gods made me a king, but they also made me a man, and mortal.’ [pg 88]

‘…it will mean nothing then, nothing at all, if one of those feeble old men happens also to be a king.’ [pg 89]

‘You have done this because you are still thinking in the old way. I told you, I *tried* to tell you, that my vision was of something new.’ [pg 92]

‘…an imposing figure, long-boned and tall, standing very straight and stuff in his chariot.’ [pg 95]

‘See, I am alive, I’m still living.’ [pg 103]

## [Chapter III](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/chapter-iii)

**Plot**

Arriving at the Scamander River, Somax urges Priam to step off the cart and take a break. The latter however, refuses. Realising that Priam feels the need to watch over the treasure, Somax proudly and affectionately states that his mule Beauty can guard the gold. When Somax reaches up to take Priam’s hand in order to help him off the cart, the king is unaccustomed to touching common man since he has been surrounded by royalty his whole life. Somax advises Priam to dabble his feet in the steam as a refreshment. The king follows the other man’s words, and is surprised to find that the water does have a ‘cooling effect’ [pg 118]. Priam is also persuaded to taste Somax’s little griddlecakes, to which he finds delicious. Somax explains that it is his daughter-in-law who makes the cakes and how he enjoys watching the cooking process. Priam realises that he has never even considered the fact that his servants carefully and delicately prepare his food every day. Priam is surprised by Somax’s chatter which had ‘no point or use’ [pg 125]. Unlike the king who has been taught to be conscious of every word expressed, Somax’s talk ‘did little harm’ [pg 126] to his dignity.

Somax reveals that his granddaughter was sick with the fever that morning, and is eager to see her recovery. He also reveals that he had once struck one of his sons, and regretted it ever since. Priam is surprised at Somax’s shame, noting that he has never regretted striking one of his children. When Somax talks about his eldest son’s death, he becomes quite emotional. Although Priam has lost sons before, including Hector, Priam could see that he had not been as attached to his sons like his companion. Sniffling, Somax continues to explain that another of his sons had also died as a result of falling into a stream while trying to secure Beauty, who had lost her balance off the stream’s ledge. Surprisingly, Somax remains affectionate towards Beauty since ‘she’s all I got left of [my son]’ [pg 141]. Upon seeing Somax in this state, Priam realises his relationship with his sons were merely ‘formal and symbolic’ [pg 136] whereas Somax shared a close, loving bond with his children.

As the pair return to the cart, they were alarmed to find a young man sitting with the treasure. The stranger announces that he is Orchilus, an escort sent by Achilles. He explains that despite the elderly men’s undoubted assumption that he was planning to steal the treasure, if he were genuinely interested he would have already done so. Priam is unconvinced since a guide to the Greek camp ‘was too good to be true’ [pg 146]. However, when noticing that Somax is even more distrusting of Orchilus, Priam pretends to be delighted at the strangers’ presence, as he does not want to seem ungrateful to Achilles. Somax is discontent, but seeing that his king has already relented, the three continue on.

As the travellers pass through two channels, the cart struggles to resist the current of the stream. Although the mules are unsteady, eventually the group reaches the bank. Everyone is wet but Orchilus waddles to the shore as though unaffected by the event. Soon after the young man begins to chatter, and appears to know a great deal about Somax and his family. Somax is furious that the man appears to know his daughter-in-law, and notices that the young man’s clothing is similar to his own despite the stranger stating that he is a Greek. He whispers this to Priam who then realises that it is in fact the god Hermes, disguised as Orchilus. The god confirms their suspicions and reveals that he was sent by others to guide the travelers to safely reach Achilles’ camp.

**Analysis**

**Priam and Somax**

Priam and Somax’s relationship allows insight into their similarities and differences. Both men are advancing in their years and both have had many children. Old men are usually characterised as kind, father figures who are filled with wisdom. While Somax upholds this representation, Priam does not. As a result of Priam living in a royal sphere for several decades, the king has been alienated from the world outside the walls of Troy. Thus, due to his limited amount of interaction with the external world, Priam lacks the quality of ‘wisdom.’ Instead, he is characterised like a child who has is ‘obedient’ [pg116] and has ‘a happy smile’ [pg 120]. It is as though Somax is his father, introducing Priam to new activities and experiences. When Priam refuses to eat the griddlecakes, Somax promises that the king will enjoy them, much alike a father encouraging their child. Priam’s realisation that the cakes taste ‘very good’ [pg 121] demonstrates that he is beginning to experiment and interact with the new environment. Much alike young children, the king is able to enjoy the simplest and most ordinary things from the delicious cakes to the coolness of the stream.

As Priam continues on his journey, he also discovers a new meaning to the word ‘love.’ Somax is evidently devoted to his family, having he only his granddaughter and daughter-in-law. He worries about his granddaughter’s fever, which strikes Priam’s attention, since the king has never taken care for his children during their illnesses. Thus, Somax’s concern causes Priam to think about things that had never previously occurred to him. Noticing the deep attachment between Somax and his family, Priam ponders if losing a son ‘really did mean the same for him as it did for the driver’ [pg 136]. The king realises that his relationships with his children are merely ‘formal and symbolic,’ and a part of the ‘splendour and the ordeal of kingship.’ Moreover, he cannot recall the exact number of children in his family, only that the number is approximately fifty. The king’s lack of clarity highlights his little in interest in family prior to this journey.

For the first time, Priam shows much interest in someone else’s life. After Somax’s chatter about his family, the king desires to learn more about the carter’s life – and feels unusual at this new feeling of ‘curiosity’ [pg 129]. This demonstrates that he is no longer solely interested in his own activities, but those of others. While the Priam undergoes a physical journey to the Greek camp, this parent-child relationship between Somax and Priam allows the latter to also develop metaphysically.

Somax’s presence is starkly contrasted to the king. Somax is the epitome of a working class commoner. His life revolves around waiting to be hired at the marketplace with his two mules and then heading home to a loving family. Priam notices how Somax is able to chatter on about anything he desires. This is puzzling for Priam, who as king takes note of every word he says to others. Although being king has its privileges of power and distinction, it is clear that Somax also has the privilege of enjoying ordinary life.

**Beauty and Shock**

Priam’s choice of two mules is contrasted to the use of traditional warhorses. Mules characterise stubbornness and independence, a reflection of Priam’s attitude following his vision. His stubbornness convinces his family and council to allow him on his journey while his independence has enabled Priam to do something extraordinary – to go undefended to Achilles’ camp. Unlike Priam’s usual warhorses, which signify power and authority, the mules represent the plain and ordinary. This allows Priam to strip himself of any royal distinction and transition into simply another man.

In addition, along with Hecuba and Hesione, Beauty is one of the few female characters in the novel. Beauty, being one of the two mules leading Priam to Achilles, represents women’s subtle yet significant role as they help to guide men to their destinations.

**Important Passages**

‘Very tactfully, his heart softened by fellow-feeling…Or a man who’s gone wandering in his sleep and doesn’t know where he is or how he got there.’ [pg 112 – 115]

‘Like an obedient toddler… allowed himself to be persuaded and took one of the little cakes in his fingers, broke off a morsel, and tasted.’ [pg 116 – 121]

‘The realm of the royal was representational, ideal…But fever is a worry.’ [pg 124 – 130]

‘Priam too sat silent…Perhaps.’ [pg 135 – 138]

**Important Quotes**

‘Well, that was foolish of course, but entirely understandable.’ [pg 112]

‘Only when he saw how startled Priam was at this unaccustomed touch did it occur to him that he might have committed some affront to the king’s sacred person.’ [pg 113]

‘…Priam, looking uncertain and out of place, stood watching.’ [pg 115]

‘If they were to move forward it was up to him.’

‘He observed with amusement that they found the royal feet every bit as disappointing and without interest as the driver’s.’ [pg 117]

‘…allowed himself to be persuaded and took one of the little cakes in his fingers, broke off a morsel, and tasted.’ [pg 121]

‘That was the price of the new.’ [pg 122]

‘The realm of the royal was representational, ideal.’ [pg 124]

‘On the whole he felt easy with himself, both in body and spirit; comfortable restored.’ [pg 125]

‘What he had to say, his pleasant way of filling the time, was of no importance. It was full of something. Interest.’ [pg 127]

‘But the truth is, we don’t just lie down and die, do we, sir? We go on. For all our losses.’ [pg 131]

‘You didn’t expect this, eh, when you decided to set out?’ [pg 153]

## [Chapter IV](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/chapter-iv)

**Plot**

Meanwhile, Achilles continues to exist in a state of grievance. Patroclus last moments were shared with Automedon, who is now Achilles’ squire\*. Achilles resents Automedon, since ‘his presence is both a reminder and a rebuke’ [pg 169] of the tragic events. The men around him are noisy and quarrelling at the dinner table but Achilles ‘barely notices all this’ [pg 172].

He then sees a figure advancing towards him. It is a ‘tall, spare…old’ [pg 173] figure, leading Achilles to believe that it is his father. The silhouette captivates him as he has been parted from his father for nine years. However, to his surprise and disappointment, the figure is revealed to be Priam. The old king pleads, ‘I have come to you, Achilles, just as you see me, just as I am, to ask you, man to man, as a father, for the body of my son. To ransom and bring him home’ [pg 175]. Priam continues to explain that the god, Hermes, guided him and that “Idaeus” is waiting outside with the treasure. Automedon exits and returns with Somax, confirming the incentive. Achilles is bemused at the presence of the Somax, since he finds it odd that the king’s famous herald is a ‘rough-looking fellow’ [pg 178]. Somax struggles to explain the situation, but Priam emotionally takes over, sharing that Somax has been good company on his journey. Hearing the king’s words, Somax is moved and ‘rubs his nose’ [pg 181]. The ‘two old men, who belong to such different worlds – the humility of the one, the awkward shyness of the other’, intrigue Achilles. He orders that the carter be fed, leaving the two rivals alone.

The king expresses that he is aware of Achilles’ son Neoptolemus. Achilles has been parted his son for most of the boy’s life, much alike Achilles and his own father. Priam pleads Achilles to ask himself what it would mean if he were to see Neoptolemus dragged in the dust for eleven days consecutively. Priam states that he has come to Achilles’ home undefended, in order to speak as a father to another father for the return of his child. Achilles is struck by Priam’s words. Achilles envisions his son killing the king and declaring, ‘There father! There Achilles! You are avenged’ [pg 186]. Horrified at this possible ending to the king’s life, he grants Priam’s wish, offering the old man a hand and declares that they will wash and prepare Hector’s body.

That night Achilles and Priam hold a ceremony for Hector. At dinner both men ‘ate together…wary at first, though also respectful, and at last quite easy, though Priam had continually to remind himself who it was he was breaking bread with’ [pg 198].

The next day, when Priam is leaving the Greeks, Achilles warmly invites Priam to ‘call on him’ [pg 200] if Troy were in trouble. Priam is surprised at his own words, asks what if Achilles was the one who were to cause the trouble in the first place. In return, Achilles states, ‘then alas for you, Priam, I will not come’ [pg 201]. He is aware that the gods are mocking them, since he and the gods have both seen Priam’s fate in the hands of Neoptolemus.

Notes:

\*A young nobleman acting as an attendant to a knight before becoming a knight himself.

**Analysis**

**Achilles**

The act of revenge has taken its toll on Achilles. He is ‘a mess in his hut’ [pg 167] and only interacts with those around him when necessary. Even when he makes an appearance at dinner, he ‘sits apart’ from his comrades, highlighting his sense of isolation. The description of the Greeks’ lifestyle as noisy and playful while feasting highlights the importance of this part of their culture. However, Achilles must ‘force’ [pg 170] himself to eat and ‘sits with a full cup of wine before him’ [pg 168]. The wine symbolises power during Ancient Greek times and demonstrates that Achilles’ is no longer “powerful” like his Myrmidons who drink plenty of wine, but weak from the burden of his guilt and suffering. In another reference to Christianity, the red wine is also a representation of redemption, as Jesus sacrificed himself after the last supper. It is now “sitting before” Achilles, waiting for him to free himself from his misery and begin his path to absolution.

In a link to the beginning of *Ransom*, Achilles refers to ‘mov[ing] into his mother’s element and is open again to her shimmering influence’ [pg 172]. The reference to his dead mother again depicts his need to be “protected” or “nurtured” during this dark stage of his life.

**Father and son relationships**

All father and son relationships in *Ransom* are separated by distance. The first example is Achilles and his father, Peleus. When Achilles sees the dark figure approaching, he assumes it is his father. Achilles sharp change in tone from melancholy to excitement and anticipation highlights his desire to be with Peleus. It appears as though he has hoped to reconcile with his father after many years apart, ‘you! At last, at last!’ [pg 172]. Secondly, Achilles and his own son Neoptolemus have lived apart for most of the young boy’s life. These relationships give reason as to why Achilles was so connected with Patroclus since he lacked any other male figure in his life. It is because of this circumstance that Achilles eagerly concludes that the figure is his father who has finally come for him. In what is perhaps fate or chance, Priam’s desire to appear simply as a father connects with Achilles’ need of a father figure, since he is ‘tall, spare [and] old’ [pg 173] with ‘wrinkle folds [and] eyes deep set under the knotty brows.’ It is because of this connection between Achilles’ father and Priam that Achilles can finally see that Priam is just another father and agrees to their truce.

Thirdly, Priam’s relationship with Hector is also established through their distance. Having gone to extraordinary lengths to reach Hector’s body, Priam’s love for his son blossoms throughout his journey. From a king and prince relationship to loving father to son, the distance apart from Hector’s body allows Priam to develop a strong emotional bond with his son. This bond between father and son is demonstrated through Priam’s passionate and touching plea to Achilles about what it means to be a father. Although all relationships between father and son are physically far apart, it is shown that this distance in fact drives the men to be more emotionally conntected to their father or son.

**Important Passages**

‘You! At last, at last!… And he offers the man, who seems suddenly too weak to get up without assistance, his hand.’ [pg 172 - 187]

‘At the feet the body of his dead enemy… has all this time been waiting and keeping watch.’ [pg 188 – 191]

‘Call on me, Priam…and on word from the driver the cart jolts on out of the camp.’ [pg 200 – 201]

**Important Quotes**

‘Achilles barely notices all this.’ [pg 168]

‘Him, Achilles tells himself bitterly, not me. In his arm, not mine.’ [pg 169]

‘For his own sake, but as a reminder too of what he himself was just a season ago.’ [pg 171]

‘You! At last, at least!’ [pg 172]

‘I am Priam, King of Troy…I have come to you, Achilles, just as you see me, just as I am, to ask you, man to man, as a father, for the body of my son. To ransom and bring him home.’ [pg 175]

‘…Hermes the giantkiller, he takes heart.’ [pg 176]

‘Fortunately Priam sees the difficulty he is in and intervenes.’ [pg 180]

‘Priam is deeply moved.’ [pg 181]

‘…the humility of the one, the awkward shyness of the other.’

‘And he offers the man, who seems suddenly too weak to get up without assistance, his hand.’ [pg 187]

‘After eleven days in the sun the body has neither the discolouration nor the smell of corruption.’ [pg 188]

‘Priam pauses, and the cruelty of the answer that comes to his lips surprises him.’ [pg 200]

‘Achilles feels a chill pass through him.’

## [Chapter V](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/chapter-v)

**Plot**

As the cart departs Achilles’ camp, they pass families of Greeks affected by the war. Women collect ‘battle relics’ while the impoverished children stare as the cart passes by. Once clear of Achilles camp, Priam requests that they stop. He takes a moment to grieve over Hector while Somax emphasises. The latter drifts off imagining how he will soon be reunited with his granddaughter as he reenters his old life, where he will wait to be ‘hired in the marketplace’ [pg 208] once again.

The travellers continue on. Both reflect on their journey silently. Somax is pleased with the outcome of the journey but is dispirited since he believes that Priam’s success is only ‘provisional’ as the gods can shift and turn their luck at any moment. Meanwhile, Priam is ‘a man remade,’ [pg 209]. The elderly king reflects on his journey, fondly reminiscing the deliciously griddlecakes and the satisfaction of feet in the cool water. As he heads home, he feels as though he ‘is divinely led as by music’ [pg 211]. Achilles like Priam, feels a sense of refreshment as highlighted by his ‘heels [which] glow.’

After Achilles’ death, his son Neoptolemus arrives at Priam’s home where he avenges his father’s death by brutally ending the king’s life. Neoptolemus describes the regret he feels after the incident, and complains that it is a ‘burden’ [pg 213] to be the famous warrior’s son.

Back in the market, Somax looks for a gift for his granddaughter. To others, he is known to rattle on about the king’s legendary journey. His listeners refuse to accept that Somax had accompanied the king on that very same journey since he is ‘a known liar’ [pg 218] and ‘a hundred years old.’ Instead, they believe that it was the king’s herald, Idaeus who had escorted the king. Despite their disbelief, it is odd that Somax owned an infamous black mule often talked about because of its role in the journey, the one named Beauty.

**Analysis**

**Priam’s journey**

The transition of Priam from a ‘naïve child’ to a wise old man is demonstrated by his capability to be in sync with the outer world rather than his confining court. For the first time in the novel, he ‘makes small sounds’ [pg 207] as he cries over Hector’s body. Although he had previously ‘grieved’ for Hector since he was ‘half-mad with grief’ [pg 45], his sense of loss was merely for the prince and heir to his throne, and not his son. As he is reunited with Hector, he now mourns as a parent, ‘wordless but not silent’ [pg 207]. This phrase regarding Priam’s silence reflects on his history since he has always had a herald to voice the king’s thoughts and opinions, leaving Priam without a need to speak to the community – a silent, powerful and domineering figure. In absence of a herald, Priam has learnt to speak for himself. His ability to also convey non-verbal communication of sadness and grief demonstrate that the king is no longer bounded by the isolation of royalty, but reunited with the rest of mankind.

Moreover, Priam’s weeping is juxtaposed with Somax, who ‘snuffles, [and] rubs his nose.’ The differences between the two’s social status evaporates as Priam and Somax are depicted as simply humans, one in the same.

**Peace versus war**

Again, peace is demonstrated to prevail over war. The words used in this chapter depict both men’s sense of enlightenment, signifying that the best answer to revenge is peace, or at the very least, a truce. Priam exists in ‘a state of exultant wellbeing’ since his journey has transformed his identity and gained back the body of his son. The stream they pass on their way back to Troy illustrates the success of Priam’s travels. Instead of representing a dangerous pathway to Achilles as the stream was previously surging, it is ‘gently sloping’ and ‘barely [reaching] their hocks’ [pg 210]. The stream demonstrates that while Priam had to overcome challenges during his journey, and the end result of a peaceful and quiet stream is a positive outcome.

Meanwhile Achilles ‘too is visited by a lightness that is both new and a return.’ The new lightness refers to his growth in seeking redemption and overcoming his hatred to form peace with his enemy. The returned lightness reflects on Achilles’ loss of self during his mourning of Patroclus. His emptiness and lack of humanity within him during the eleven days of burning rage lead him to become someone that even he could not recognise. The restoration of this lightness, symbolises his restoration of sight, since he is no longer blinded by his loss, but endowed with a cleansing as he has evaluated his actions and reached a state of peace. Furthermore, Achilles’ heel represents vulnerability, despite his physical strength. The image of Achilles’ heels glowing suggests that he has conquered his weakness and exists in a state of contentment.

**Identity**

The issue of identity is portrayed by the people’s disbelief of Somax’s story. Although Priam appointed Somax as the herald during the journey, this identity was never truly fitting for Somax. Throughout the novel the king once rarely calls Somax his herald’s name, Idaeus, highlighting that one cannot be given another’s identity, since they do not represent the same characteristics, beliefs and history. This idea is demonstrated again through those who refuse to believe Somax’s chatter, highlighting that one’s identity cannot be forced to change; an identity is who we are, and what we stand for, one that unique to us only.

**Life is a cycle**

Malouf reminds readers that all things come to an end. Somax’s thoughts of returning back to his normal life show that although we may experience a significant event, time continues on and as such, we move on into the next chapter of our lives. Although this is the case, the lessons we learn remain with us until it is our time to pass away.

With a hint of touching sadness, he also demonstrates that life is full of cycles. Although Achilles has learnt to deal with grief with acceptance instead of revenge, his own son’s actions are analogous with those of his father. By savagely murdering Priam, Neoptolemus’s behaviour echoes the same fury and hatred that Achilles possessed at the beginning of the novel. It is shown that although we may learn from our mistakes, we will meet death, thus allowing others to repeat the same mistakes and learn the same lessons.

**Important Quotes**

‘Ghostly figures materialize for a moment among them, then dissolve.’ [pg 205]

‘Priam, refusing help, climbs down, walks round to the bed of the cart and at least lifts the coverlet from the face of his son.’ [pg 207]

‘Wordless but not silent.’

‘In no time now, he tells himself, I will be back in my own life.’

‘ He does not think of this as a beginning; or not, anyway, of something large. How could it be? What lies ahead is the interim of the truce, a time for ordinary life to be resumed, one day then the next; no more than that can be counted on. But in his present mood it is enough.’ [pg 209]

‘Priam…feels his homecoming now as the coming home to a state of exultant wellbeing in which he too is divinely led as by music.’ [pg 211]

‘To be son to the great Achilles is a burden.’ [pg 213]

‘…the misery of this moment will last forever; that is the hard fact he must live with. However the story is told and elaborated, the raw shame of it will be with him now till his last breath.’ [pg 214]

‘As for all that has happened in these last hours, what a tale he will have to tell! He will tell it often over the years.’ [pg 215]

[**Ransom Essay Prompts**](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/ransom-essay-prompts)

1. *Ransom* suggests that revenge is not the answer to grief.
2. *Ransom* demonstrates that though it may be difficult, anyone can change their ways. Discuss.
3. Women have no important role in *Ransom*.
4. In *Ransom*, the characters confront their battles with love or revenge.
5. Malouf suggests that peace triumphs over war. Discuss.
6. Love drives the characters to act unimaginably.
7. The characters’ sense of humanity disappears when they lose a loved one.
8. Both Achilles and Priam journey through pain and loss to ultimately find peace.
9. David Malouf suggests that revenge and guilt are connected.
10. Redemption helps the characters in *Ransom* find peace.
11. *Ransom* demonstrates that even the common man can teach royalty many things.
12. *Ransom* shows that royal members are not superior to commoners.
13. Priam is depicted ‘like an obedient toddler’ at the beginning of his journey. How does this journey change him into a man?
14. ‘In the long vista of time he might already be gone.’ David Malouf proposes that human significance in the world is transient. Do you agree?
15. ‘*Ransom*’ refers to the situation between Achilles and Priam. What other ransoms occur in the novel?
16. The true hero of *Ransom* is Somax. Discuss.
17. Ransom shows that the gods have a significant role in the fate of the characters.
18. In David Malouf’s Ransom, it is the commoner who is shown to be privileged, not royalty. Discuss.
19. The characters’ identity is not defined by their names, but who they are.
20. ‘…[S]mall waves kick up, gather, then collapse, and new ones replace them; and this, even as he watches, repeats itself, and will do endlessly.’ *Ransom* illustrates that the cycle of life is repeated. To what extent do you agree?

## [Ransom Study Tips](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/ransom-study-tips)

**Watch *Troy***

Based on [*The Iliad*](http://www.vcestudyguides.com/guides/text_response/ransom/the-iliad), the 2004 film *Troy* directed by David Benioff retells the events leading to, and after Hector’s death. Although it does not depict Priam’s journey to the Greek camp, the film portrays the king seeking Achilles’ compassion for his son. This method of learning is fantastic if you are unclear or unfamiliar with the story of *The Iliad* since will provided you a greater background to the history of the Trojan War.

**Read *The Iliad* by Homer**

Reading the novel *The Iliad* by Homer will provide you insight into the original tale written during the 8th century BC. The classic explores in detail Achilles’ refusal to fight for his leader Agamemnon, Patroclus’ role in the war and also the disputes between the gods as they argue over the fate of mortals.

Note: Reading the entire novel is recommended but is not a necessity. Due to time restraints of VCE, if unable to complete this task, select important chapters or events (such as those mentioned above) in *The Iliad* to enhance your understanding of *Ransom*.

**Appreciate the differences between *The Iliad* and *Ransom***

Appreciating the differences in storyline will lead to better understanding of the themes and symbols in *Ransom*. One of the main differences between the two texts is their depiction of Priam’s journey to Achilles. In *The Iliad*, this journey is explored only momentarily, and focuses more on the presence of Hermes. The inclusion of the new character Somax in *Ransom* provides a stark contrast between common man and royalty. While *The Iliad* touches the surface of the characters’ suffering, Malouf delves into the emotional journey that the characters undergo during the darkest episode in the Trojan War.